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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the activities of 50 rural special education teachers in providing life survival skills education to secondary learning disabled and behaviorally disturbed students as part of a special education inservice program at a land grant university. The program offered a yearlong, 9 credit hour, sequence of courses, which included courses presented via interactive audio telecommunications, an intensive summer session, and a supervised field practice at school. Research shows that when mildly handicapped students seek employment after high school, they often lack skills in socialization and vocational adjustment. Currently, most schools of education do not adequately prepare teachers to develop and implement a life survival skills program, which will benefit mildly handicapped adolescents in the transition from school to adult life, especially in rural areas. The teachers conducted an assessment of the life skill needs of their students and of the employment life skills needs of their rural communities. Local employers, school personnel, former students, parents, and school administrators were involved in the assessment. Subsequently, each teacher designed a life skills program based on the results of the assessment and on the characteristics of the rural schools setting where the program would be implemented. Some of the specific programs designed and implemented by the teachers were: (1) a Vocational Guidance class; (2) social skills training; (3) integration of life skills into reading and math instruction; (4) career education in content areas; and (5) on-the-job training. Barriers to the programs included lack of funds, time, jobs, and transportation. (KS)

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# Life Survival Skills

for

Mildly Handicapped students in Rural High Schools

## Abstract

Secondary teachers of the mildly handicapped face special challenges and opportunities in rural areas. Because of the needs of students and the concerns of parents, many secondary level special educators are moving away from tutorial programs and toward programs which focus on teaching life skills necessary to help their students in the transition from school to work and community.

This presentation will describe activities of 50 rural special education teachers as they provide life survival skills education for secondary learning disabled and behaviorally disturbed students. These teachers were part of a special education inservice program at a land grant university in the midwest. The program offered a yearlong, 9 credit hour, sequence of courses which included courses presented via interactive audio telecommunications, an intensive summer session, and a supervised field practice at their schools.

The teachers conducted assessment activities to learn the life skill needs of their students and the employment life skills needs of their rural communities. Local employers, school personnel, former students, parents, and school administrators were involved in this assessment. Subsequently, each teacher designed a life skills program based on the results of the assessment and on the characteristics and the rural school setting where the program would be implemented. Then, the teachers implemented and evaluated their programs. Modifications were made in subsequent years. Examples of programs designed and implemented by teachers were: social skills, school survival skills, work sampling

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program, mentor programs, and on the job training.

The objectives of this presentation are to describe the teacher inservice program and to present the results of the preassessments the teachers conducted. The programs they developed will also be described. The differences in similar life skills programs in urban areas will be discussed and the special adaptions teachers made to assure program applicability in their rural communities will be highlighted. This presentation will point out important rural variables that must be considered in developing transition program training for teachers and in preparing and implementing life skills programs for mildly handicapped.

Introduction. There is increasing interest in the long-term effects of mild handicaps such as learning disabilities, educable mental retardation and behavior disorders on students from adolescence to adulthood. Secondary special education programs appear to have little impact on students' adjustment to community life (Edgar, 1987). Many recent studies of life adjustment of mildly handicapped individuals indicate an urgent need to help students with these life survival skills for transition from school to adulthood. An understanding of the post-school adjustment of this population is critical to the planning of effective junior high and high school programs. Follow-up studies have shown difficulties in socialization and vocational adjustment after high school.

Socialization. Socialization skills are those skills that are designed to help learners interact with peers, employers, parents and teachers (Wircenski, 1982). Numerous authors have reported social and interpersonal variables as significant problem areas for mildly handicapped adults. In a discussion of preliminary results from a university setting, Blalock (1981) stated that more than one-half of her sample had experienced social perception problems. Other authors have reported such characteristics as an inability to make friends (Fafard & Haubarich, 1981; Gray, 1981; White, Schumaker, Warner, Alley, and Deshler, 1980), dissatisfactions with contracts with parents and relatives (White et al., 1980), and a restricted range of places for social contacts (Fafard and Haubarich, 1981). Smith (1988) states that other concerns were shyness, frustration, lack of self-confidence, and difficulty controlling emotions and temper.

Several studies found social deficits to be the major area of concern to adults. In a study of 560 LD adults (age 18-36+) conducted by the Association of Children with Leaning Disabilities, Chelser (1982) reported

the areas of life in which the greatest need for assistance were expressed. These are listed in rank order below.

1. Social relationships and skills
2. Career counseling
3. Developing self-esteem, confidence (tied)
4. Overcoming dependence, survival (tied)
5. Vocational training
6. Job getting and holding
7. Reading
8. Spelling
9. Management of personal finances
10. Organizational skills

As can be seen, academic-type skills were rated relatively low while social and occupational skills were greatest concern. Thus, the deficit areas that first brought this population to light are no longer reported as the primary deficit areas in adults.

Vocational Adjustment. The vast majority of handicapped youth who leave high school each year encounter severe unemployment and underemployment problems (Rusch and Phelphs, 1987; Hasazi, Johnson, Hasazi and Gordon, 1989). Edgar (1987) found that of high school graduates of secondary special education programs, less than 18% obtained employment with a salary above minimum wage and proposes that these special education students do not appear to be "partaking of the fruits of our society."

White et al. (1985) compared 50 LD and 50 non-LD young adults and found that LD subjects were employed in jobs with significantly lower job status and expressed significantly greater dissatisfaction with their employment situation. These same LD young adults showed significantly lower aspirations for future education or training than the non-LD young adults.

Many similar results were found in the survey conducted by the ACLD (Chelser, 1982). Preliminary results of the survey indicate that 52% of the respondents were employed and 47% were unemployed. Among the unemployed, 71% were being at least partially supported by their parents. A recent Census Bureau report (1989) clearly shows that fewer and fewer disabled persons are at work. The report also shows that earnings of disabled men and women were below that of non-disabled workers, probably because employers keep disabled workers at entry-level jobs. Other studies reporting anecdotal or summary information concerning

vocational adjustment (e.g., Blalock, 1981; Fafard and Haubarich, 1981; Patton and Polloway, 1982) conclude that most mildly handicapped adults, particularly the learning disabled, have vocational adjustment problems.

Provision of life survival skills to school age handicapped children and youth is essential to the adult adjustment of these individuals. As evidenced by professional literature, the need is clear. Time and time again authors have stated the handicapped adults are experiencing major problems with vocational and social adjustments. While there can be no question that academic instruction is very important, the ultimate purpose of our programs is to prepare handicapped individuals for adult life. This must involve the inclusion of instruction in human relationships, career information and exploration, and actual job and daily living skills.

Teacher Education Currently, most schools of education do not adequately prepare teachers to develop and implement a life survival skills program which will benefit mildly handicapped adolescents in the transition from school to adult life, especially in rural areas of the state. To do so goes beyond the state minimum competencies and includes a complete training sequence option in life survival skills. Such preparation could include these competencies:

1. Acquire knowledge of the scope and sequence of life survival skills. Students acquire the ability to:
   a. explain the relationship of special education, regular education, and life survival skills;
   b. describe the disciplines involved in life survival skills;
   c. describe instructional and administrative arrangements for life survival skills; and
   d. describe the roles that teachers, other professionals and parents assume in providing instruction in life survival skills.
2. Acquire knowledge of the concepts used to examine constraints to implementing a life survival skills program in a middle school secondary setting and select strategies to circumvent these constraints. Students will acquire the ability to:
   a. describe procedures used to conduct a setting analysis; and
   b. explain procedures needed to circumvent constraints found in a setting analysis.
3. Acquire knowledge of processes to establish constructive pupil-co-workers, pupil-supervisor and pupil-adult interpersonal relationships. Students will acquire the ability to:

a. explain the impact of social, affective and pupil variables on adult adjustments;
b. describe methods for pupils to maintain adequate co-workers, supervisor, and other adult communication; and
c. describe methods to establish individual and group guidance programs for pupils.

4. Implement a plan for a life survival skills program in their school. The student will acquire the ability to:
   a. develop a plan to implement a life survival skills program;
   b. involve other building staff members in developing and implementing the life survival skills program; and
   c. proceed through the steps of implementation.
5. Acquire knowledge of rural variables which impact on student acquisition of the skills and on programmatic change in rural schools.
   a. describe aspects of rural special education and describe barriers and assets of providing services to special needs students in rural areas;
   b. develop strategies for working with parents and community members to support life skills programs and to provide successful employment opportunities for mildly handicapped youth; and
   c. develop consulting and collaboration skills to involve other teachers, counselors, and administrators in providing life skills education in rural schools.

Post-secondary programs exist which help teachers provide instruction for the school-to-community and work transition. Often, however, these programs are based on urban models. This does not learn they can be successfully transplanted to rural settings (Link, 1989). Unique characteristics of rural areas, rural populations, and rural schools prohibit such generalization and rural teachers must contend with different types of problems than their urban counterparts (Helge, 1984; Nachitgal, 1982).

For a rural transition program to be successful, it must focus on a functional curriculum which can be adapted to a variety rural contexts. A curriculum is functional if it is designed to prepare students for opportunities that are available in their community (Link, 1989). Teachers must assess employment options in their rural communities and identify specific skills needed to succeed in these jobs. This primary step in developing successful life skills programs for mildly handicapped rural

youth requires rural teachers to consider these aspects of local rural communities (especially employers) which will impact their students transition from school. This calls for community assessments to be made in addition to the more typical pre-instructional assessment of life skills such as occupational interests, vocational aptitude, and social and prevocational abilities.

Developing and evaluating life skills programs based on these assessments becomes the next step for the secondary teacher of mildly handicapped students in rural areas. Programs, thus are individualized to each community, and their rural characteristics are taken into account.

Fifty secondary teachers in rural Kansas special education classrooms conducted comprehensive community assessments to determine the life skills needs of their students.

First, the teachers conducted follow-ups on at least five special education students who had either graduated or dropped out from their school. The teachers used a adaptation of a follow-up survey form developed by The University of Kansas Institute for Research in Learning Disabilities. Information was collected on employment/unemployment statues, level of income, types of jobs held, civic participation, goals for future education or training, leisure activities, interpersonal relationships with families and others, marital status, and the areas of their lives in which they were having the most difficulty. In general, the teacher found their results mirrored the results of most of the published follow-up studies. However, this activity produced additional valuable information in other ways. For example, some learned of important sources of information and/or jobs about which they had not previously know. Others, after analyzing the patterns of success or common areas of difficulty among the person answering the survey, were able to identify strong or weak areas of their curricula. Still others were able to use this information with their classes to provide a rationale for changing from a tutorial approach to a more functional approach.

The teachers also conducted a surveys of businesses in their towns or local areas. Using a form developed from research done by White (1982), they interviewed a minimum of five employers from each of the following types of businesses: retail, manufacturing, and service. The form contained 25 skill statements validated to represent the domain of occupationally-related skills found in most published career education or transition curricula (see below). Employers were asked to rate each statement, on a five point scale, as to its importance to their entry level

employees. Though there was some variability across towns, the following top-rated skills from one town are representative of the results from the majority of the employers.

Service Employers

interpersonal relationships
following instructions
appropriate behavior
listening techniques
quality standards
personal value

Retail Employers

appropriate behavior
following instructions
see self as worker
counting money
quality standards

Industrial Employers

quality standards
following instruction
appropriate behavior
listening techniques
personal value

Completion of this survey not only resulted in an objective listing of the most important skills in the immediate area but also communicated to the surveyor that not all skills in published curricula were appropriate in any given location. That is employability and/or transition skills may be employer-specific and even geographically-specific.

This information proved to be very useful when developing life skills programs for their students. It was also very beneficial because the teachers got out into the teachers communities and talked with the local business people. The teacher learned that they did not know as much as they thought they did about their communities and the business people were appreciative that someone from the school system (finally) took the time to ask them about their needs. In nearly all communities where this survey was done vastly improved communication and cooperation between the schools and the business community resulted.

These 50 teachers reported developing a wide variety of life skills programs within their schools. Teachers focused on such diverse goals as informed citizenship, consumer education, communication, career exploration, work-study, pre-vocational skills, survival English,

vocational testing, study skills, social skills, and decision making. Most of the teachers reported having access to a computer and utilizing computer programs which focused on life skills, such as Social Skills on the job.

Some of the specific programs designed and implemented by these rural teachers are:

Teresa Hickey, an LD Resource teacher in Hutchinson High School, developed a Vocational Guidance class with the help and support of her school's vice-principal, work-study coordinator, computer instructor, librarian and a vocational teacher. The primary focus of the class is on career awareness and exploration and the acquisition of necessary transitional skills. The overview of occupations is based on the fifteen Kansas Career Job Clusters. Job exploration makes use of local area speakers, field trips to area businesses and even temporary placement on JPTA job sites. The class is for juniors and seniors, but a more basic class is offered for younger students.

Social skills are taught to the resource students through modeling, role playing, feedback and evaluation. An example of one social skills unit developed is eating out at a pizza restaurant. Seven subskills were targeted, practiced, video-taped and reviewed. The final step is a visit to a local area pizza restaurant.

Life survival skills are also the basis of Teresa's basic academic lessons in her LD resource room. A daily newspaper is utilized in the reading program. For example, daily weather forecasts are discussed and grocery specials are reviewed (one student in the class is employed as a checker in the local grocery store). The want ads are used to provide letter or resume writing experiences. Social activities are planned by local events, movies at theaters and church events. For math instruction, time sheets are figured by the entire class for the students who are employed outside of school. Projected earnings are figured and budgets prepared and compared.

Other local activities involving such activities as voter registration, local politics, voting procedures and local court and law enforcement activities highlight the social science class.

Janet Sleichter, LD Resource Room, Abilene Middle School, feels the need to relate the importance of career education to the lives of her LD students. She has made changes in her curriculum to include daily career activities instead of isolated, occasional job-related activities teaching units. She also includes job related projects in content area teaching - specifically spelling, math, English. For example, one week's spelling

words may pertain to a specific job cluster.

Social skills are also incorporated into the classroom curriculum with the knowledge, support and input of the student's parents. The first social skill unit used small group discussion and role-playing to allow the students to practice appropriate reactions to teasing by classmates and schoolmates - a skill targeted by both students and parents as a priority. Learned strategies and modeled behavior helped the students be successful in real-life situations in which they were teased. Other units of social skill training are also included. Janet feels the area of social skills is one of the most positive areas to be included in her revised curriculum.

The purpose of Cynthia Robertson's program at Sedan High School is to teach social skills to LD high school students. The importance of the skills will be applied to vocational situations as well as school and classroom situations. The first targeted skills are: arriving at class on time and with needed materials, completing given assignments and following directions.

Cynthia approached her program in a cooperative spirit. She felt the development and improvement of these skills should not be an isolated responsibility. Other teachers of the participating students are involved in supporting and observing the targeted behaviors. Parents are contacted, informed and continually updated on positive results of the program. If any participating students hold a job, the skills are applied to the work situation through the participation of the employer or supervisor.

Student modeling and monitoring, self-evaluation, teacher observation and checklists combine with individualized rewards for success promote continued compliance and improvement.

Mona Brown teaches at Mt. Vernon High School in rural Missouri. Her objective is to instill in her LD students the skills necessary to obtain and maintain employment that will give them a standard of living enabling them to live a fulfilling life. The characteristics of her rural students (limited view and experiences, lack of future goals) and the community (small, rural and a shrinking economic base) provided the catalyst for this project.

Mona's program is targeted toward personal self-improvement in her students - specifically their handling criticism and dealing with authority figures. The skills center around those necessary for success on the job. Instruction will take place in a life skills or vocations class.

Class activities include role-playing and generalization activities coordinated by support staff within the school and district. Community

members have also showed a willingness to support and cooperate with the activities. Discussion groups, supplementary text and worksheets are also utilized. Progress is monitored by Mona, other school support staff, the students themselves and participating community members. Mona has had a difficult job getting a non-tutorial program implemented because of philosophical opposition from administrators and the school board.

Boyd Koehn targeted 4 social skills to teach one hour per week in his interrelated resource room in a small, rural school near Longton, Kansas. The skills selected were listening, following directions, negotiation and problem solving. These skills were rated high in need by service, retail sales and manufacturing employers. A fourth group that had input on skill selection was ex-students of Boyd's Elk Valley School Resource Program. The current resource students were also allowed some decisions concerning the order in which the chosen skills would be taught.

Nancy Olson named one of her projects the Thank-Goodness-It's-Friday program in an attempt to use one day a week (Friday) as a day to target social skills in her special education classroom. Nancy used school and community feedback to design activities that require interaction and used out-of-school opportunities to reinforce important social skills discussed in class during the week. She found this "informal" method of instruction much more beneficial than "direct" instruction of social skills.

One such activity was the planning and making of a spirit banner for the school's hall. During the activity, the students were expected to practice their social skills and give positive and negative feedback. Later, during class discussions, references could be made to the activity and analysis of good use, poor use or opportunity for use of specific skills.

Nancy has come to believe very strongly that social skills need to be taught in relevancy to what is going on in the students' lives. Another example includes the approach of Homecoming and asking others for dates. Other ideas for relevant social skills come from problems mentioned to Nancy by parents concerning their children's behaviors at home, and the students talking about problems with their parents. Role-playing and group discussions are used and Nancy has found that the students are becoming more comfortable offering suggestions to classmates.

Nancy has also decided that targeting each Friday for social skills is not enough time. She is changing the focus of the school's required Health class to include more self-improvement and self-awareness for the students. This has prompted her to rename the Health class to "Innerchange". She also says that to compensate for the time taken away from life skills classes, the school administrators and the community are

currently developing a work-study program and a career discovery program that will teach life and vocational skills.

Karlene Knopf in Gypsum, Kansas, works on specific social skills in her classroom using modeling and role-playing to achieve results. A very shy girl began using eye contact, smiling and accepting compliments. The girl's self-esteem and confidence grew and her grades improved. Other teachers noted the changes. Another student was noticed participating in groups rather than staying by himself. Another important component is the ability of the students to identify the appropriate skill needed in situations presented by the teacher or occurring in real-life.

Karlene plans to encourage the elementary and junior high school resources teachers within her small school community to also consider teaching social skills and help develop a continuous program. Involving parents in the program has been a key to Karlene's success.

Special considerations or adaptions were made by most of these teachers because of the rural setting of their programs. Many of these considerations represented barriers to their work with life skills programs; however, many teachers saw the positive aspects of their rural setting.

1. Being the only person who would advocate for programs for the mildly handicapped. Feeling like program development was constantly "re-inventing the wheel".
2. Rural employers being very willing to work with students, but being unable (or unwilling) to pay them.
3. Limitation of diverse array of jobs. Difficulty in finding jobs.
4. Too few students to merit whole classes in career development, social skills, etc.
5. Willingness of employers to give students a chance and to work with school personnel.
6. Ease in finding time to communicate with parents and their willingness to support life skills programs.
7. Lack of transportation. One teacher drove a student to her work every day.
8. Distances to travel. Another drove to other towns to monitor progress for her work-study programs.
9. Students' participation in instructional activities when they were seen as relevant to life outside school.
10. Utilizing community resources and gaining support of Job Service, Voc. Rehabilitation, JPTA, etc.
11. Problems deviating from the traditional "tutoring resource room"

model.

Rural communities, students, and employers demonstrate a variety of unique characterisitics which must be considered in formulating life skills programs for mildly handicapped youth. Although many of the problems are the same as in urban areas, urban programs do not necessarily fit in rural schools. We have described programs developed by rural secondary teachers for their student with special needs. These teachers show their commitment to their students and their creativity in exploiting the advantages found in rural areas and meeting the challenge, they also find that impact in their rural special education programs.